

Press Briefing by the Press Secretary, Ben Rhodes, Tom Donohue and Andrew Liveris

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MR. EARNEST: Good morning, everybody. It's nice to see you. We've got some special guests at the top of our briefing today. I'm joined by Tom Donohue, who is the CEO of the United States Chamber of Commerce. To his right is Andrew Liveris, who is the CEO of Dow. Both of them are obviously here traveling with the President to attend the Hannover Messe.

They are part -- there are a couple of reasons why it's significant that they're here. They're part of the contingent of about 350 U.S. business leaders who are here at Hannover, including about 200 business leaders representing small and medium U.S. companies. So they are a good representation of the U.S. business community's participation in this presidential trip.

In addition, both Tom and Andrew joined the President last night for dinner with Chancellor Merkel and other business leaders, and it was an opportunity for business leaders in our two countries to have a conversation about the business climate, and opportunities for expanding business between our two countries.

So they'll have some insight on a range of issues. And each of them has prepared short opening statements that they'll deliver. And then I'll call on you and you can ask them whatever questions you would like. After they've concluded, then I'll be joined by my colleague, Ben Rhodes, and he and I can take your questions on other areas of interest.

So, with that, Tom, do you want to go first?

MR. DONOHUE: Well, thank you very much, Josh. And it's very nice to see you all. I'm pleased to be here with Andrew Liveris from DOW, one of America's great CEOs, involved in extraordinary changes in his industry, and you'll be pleased to visit with him.

Let me begin by thanking the President, Ambassador Froman, Secretary Pritzker and others for making this trip. I was here a number of years ago, and encouraged them to do this because this is an extraordinary opportunity to come together with people from the EU, particularly from Germany, to talk about what we have to do to strengthen our economies and to pass the trade bills that are going to help us do that.

It sends a strong message -- their presence -- about the vital importance of the transatlantic partnership, the largest commercial relationship in the world and one based on shared values. No other partnership in the last 70 years has done more to advance global economic growth, establish a robust and fair trading system, and to enforce the democratic opportunity, security and values around the world. Like the President, the U.S. Chamber is here to bolster that relationship.

Last night, as Josh indicated, we had a great discussion with President Obama and German Chancellor Merkel on these issues and others. Today, the Chamber will also be cohosting a bilateral business summit here at the fair focusing on the importance of the steps we've got to take to shore up our economies and to strengthen the relationship between the U.S. and the EU. And tomorrow I'll be in Munich to pursue these very same arguments with the business leaders there.

Our primary message on this trip is that the transatlantic relationship is more important than ever, and so is our global leadership in that regard. We may not see eye-to-eye all the time with this administration -- nor should we -- but we stand shoulder-to-shoulder when it comes to advancing job-creating trade agreements like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the TPP.

The one that we're discussing here is a once-in-a-generation opportunity not only to boost our economic advantage, but to fundamentally strengthen this relationship. It's going to spur jobs and investment. It's going to reduce needless regulation. It's going to take away

barriers, and it's going to help us in a geopolitical way as well.

Later today, we'll all be filing a joint -- the Chamber and others -- encouragement, a public statement that sort of follows what I just said. We appreciate the President's support of TPP. The demands on the President, no matter whether you agree with him, you don't agree with him, whatever issue is on the table, are unbelievable. And that he took this time to come here was very important, and I congratulate him for it.

And thank you very much.

MR. LIVERIS: Thank you, Tom. Great to share the podium with you and to take this opportunity to also reinforce the importance of this trip and thank the President for taking the leadership to be the number-one salesman for the United States of America.

And I would say that as a global company with a large presence here in Germany. We have 17 facilities, 14 manufacturing plants, 5,000 employees. It's our third largest country, and we've been here over 60 years. We are as German as we are American. And we believe that the human spirit shifting back on trade as the primary way of seeking to get economic balance around the world -- from all the technologies available to us, whether it be in the United States or Germany, or in the EU, in general -- effective water treatment to energy efficiency, to all the things that we can invent and innovate, this cross-border trading mechanism is key.

And, of course, being here at Hannover Messe, which is the bastion of the civil world of trade and investment, from a German perspective, post-World War II -- we heard from both the President and the Chancellor yesterday in the opening of how important this site was to all things innovation and trade.

There is a rich history here, and both the President and the Chancellor referred to it not only in their speeches, but also at the dinner. I must say I sat there in awe of seeing these two great leaders with their two business delegations talking business and government and at its intersections. Because like the Chamber, and like all of us who operate at the intersection of business and government, it's vital that we're at the table, and it's vital that this is a public-private collaboration of which the two leaders sponsor.

And the mechanism to achieve that to the next level for the benefit of all European citizens and American citizens is T-TIP, and getting that through the agenda this year. This is a comprehensive negotiation. It means a lot of hard work. It means to take what Tom talked about to the next level of transatlantic cooperation.

I heard the President last night say that there is no more important relationship than the Atlantic relationship to the United States of America. This is very true as well on the business side. Why? Because of innovation centrality. These two cultures and sets of countries cooperated through postwar environments, Cold War environments, and now through a trade and innovation environment.

And I'm very proud of the fact that T-TIP has bubbled to the top of the agenda for both the continent of Europe as well as, of course, the United States. The AmCham EU Group did a study that said it could lift Germany's GDP by 0.6 percent if T-TIP was adopted.

We have our work to do to talk about the benefits, and I want to home in on two particular benefits. The one, a rising tide lifts all boats. There is no compromise on regulatory standards here. There's dilution of the great EU standards, nor the great American standards, but a harmonization to remove frictions costs, to have these standards speak to each other, to do it in such a way that's transparent so that it can lift exporters of both nations -- Made in America, Made in Germany, Made in the EU as a higher standard.

We owe it to humanity that, in fact, we go to the second point on making that happen, which is leadership. Both the Chancellor and the President and, for that matter, all the EU leaders have to embrace this as global leadership. Just like Paris and COP21, there's no more important sense of leadership on trade than trade and investment across borders, and to put transparency in standards to raise the quality of life for all of our citizens.

Those two reasons are the reasons people like me come to missions like this. It's important to take time out of our agenda to show up and reinforce these two leaders in what they have to do. We have a job to do to communicate. Your job and our job is to allow all of our citizens to understand why this is good for them, why this, in fact, will help them on quality of life, and will help them on increasing wages and making them part of an improving economy, not one that suffers at the hands of trade, as some people are prone to think.

So, with that, I'd like to hand it over to Josh, and take Q&A. Thank you, Josh.

MR. EARNEST: Thank you, Andrew.

Questions. Justin, you want to go first?

Q Yes, I had a few for you guys. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what you see as the likelihood of TPP negotiations -- or the TPP vote finishing this year, and T-TIP negotiations finishing by the end of the President's term. I'm also wondering if there was any discussion at dinner with Chancellor Merkel of Volkswagen and their emissions problems, and how -- well, any discussion on that at all.

And finally, Mr. Donohue, there's news back home the Kasich and Cruz campaigns are now coordinating together to sort of prevent Donald Trump from getting the number of delegates he needs for the Republican nomination. (Laughter.) I know the Chamber has expressed concern over his trade policies before, and so I'm wondering if that's something you endorse.

MR. DONOHUE: Well, first of all, let me be very clear. Last night there was no discussion of Volkswagen.

And now let's get to the other issues. I think your question we expected, by the way, because we're thinking about it all the time -- is when is the vote on TPP going to happen? Well, as you know, in the Senate, it's going to be the closest vote for Senate in a long, long time, and there are four or five people that are running -- that are in the Republican caucus that would be at risk, perhaps, if they voted for it right now, today. And so I would say that that would -- that vote in the Senate would come after the election. It will come.

The vote in the House, with any luck, could be a little bit earlier -- not much. And the reason that I would encourage that is because it will be hard to cram two votes into a lame duck issue.

Now, let me just say one deal about those votes. In a tough economy, in an election year, nobody is in favor of trade. It seems it's something they can blame on everybody else, and so it's hard to get a vote. But when you do vote a trade bill, what you need is you need to win by two votes -- one vote to win, and one vote in case somebody dies on the way to the vote. And everybody else can be excused from the vote. And we don't care how many we win by -- we only care that we win. And both of these votes will, in my opinion, be held before the end of this administration.

On the question of the T-TIP, that will go through the Congress much easier -- much more easily -- because it's a relationship with our largest trading partner who, for the longest time, said to have stronger regulations, more favorable labor regulations and other issues, and with that as an argument, I think we could get that done in a very convenient and more easily passed. But it's going to take a while to get people here and people in the United States focused on doing not a half-baked bill but a really good trade agreement. And I would hope that you'd see something happen there in the next 90 days.

MR. EARNEST: Other questions this morning?

Yes, this gentleman in the back.

Q You just said that last night there were no talks about Volkswagen, so I wonder, what about today?

MR. LIVERIS: I've heard nothing.

MR. DONOHUE: I've heard nothing, either. We've been at different kinds of meetings early today, and so we've not been with the President or the Chancellor, or with the leaders of the governments. We'll see more of those people today. I don't expect that while everybody is trying to drive trade and investment we'll hear too much about that.

MR. EARNEST: Let me just add one part to this, which is that obviously the President is constrained in what he would be able to discuss on this particular issue, given the ongoing legal proceedings. That certainly applies in public, but the truth is, that also implies to his discussions in private, as well. So I certainly can't speak for what kinds of conversations

may be going on among business leaders who are here, but I can tell you that the President does not anticipate engaging in discussions about that specific issue, either in public or in private.

Other questions?

Yes, sir.

Q My question is about procurement Buy American -- we had an interview with Sigmar Gabriel yesterday, the German federal minister for the economy, who said there will be no deal on T-TIP if the U.S. doesn't open up their procurement markets. And I guess he means not only on the federal but on the state level. So is there any room in the negotiations actually from the American side to compromise here?

MR. LIVERIS: I'll answer that by stating nothing specific. There was actually an anecdote at dinner, but, look, operating in 162 countries, we run into buy X all the time, so buy China, and China buy duh-duh-duh. This is one of the biggest non-tariff tariff barriers. So speaking to common harmonization of trade starts to get at those sorts of barriers so that you don't force someone to go build a factory in your home jurisdiction to have the local procurement requirement fulfilled.

I know, listening to Mike Froman last night, that the Chancellor and the President were urging the two negotiators to get to the details of negotiations yet this summer. And I know that's one of the topics of great import. But nothing specific -- unless, Tom, you had something.

MR. DONOHUE: The Chamber of Commerce of the United States is fundamentally opposed to the Buy America efforts that are making it more difficult to negotiate really strong trade agreements. Most of that comes from the states -- individual states -- not from the federal approach. And generally, we're able to work those out, even when the states put them in place, because when they find out the problem it creates for their own state, we usually find a way around it.

But I think to get a T-TIP agreement we're going to have to pretty much put something in there that codifies that.

MR. EARNEST: Other questions?

Yes, sir.

Q Mr. Liveris, I'm just curious whether you could elaborate a little bit on the anecdote you just mentioned yesterday at the dinner.

MR. LIVERIS: The anecdote was exactly just -- the leaders were very relaxed. And if I could talk about the ambience of the relationship -- and I've been around it a little bit, not as much as maybe Tom has -- it's an exceptionally good relationship, and it permeated the whole dinner conversation. And I've been part of those sorts of dinners in other forums -- not necessarily between the Chancellor and the President -- but just to see the way it was conducted -- and the Chancellor is just incredible in the sense of her humbleness and her ability to make you feel at home. It was just a perfect hosting event. And there were friendly little jabs at each other about what could be the basis of a T-TIP negotiation. I think this was all done in good humor, so anecdotes occurred. I don't know, Tom, if there was any more to it than that.

MR. DONOHUE: No, I think that was great.

Q Mr. Donohue, I'd like to follow up on Justin's question about the Cruz and the Kasich campaigns and your reaction.

MR. DONOHUE: I thought I did a good job --

Q Yes, I thought I'd give it one more shot.

MR. DONOHUE: Look, I've been around a long time, and before most other elections you run into people in your business or in your personal life and they'd ask you about the election, and your reaction is, well, you have this view, and the polls said this and this is

what you might expect. Quite frankly, we're not sure where this whole thing is going. Will it end up in an open convention? Nobody knows. And there are challenges on the Democratic side, as well.

I think it's very hard to speculate. It is true that some are trying to figure out a way to head off Mr. Trump. At the rate he is gathering delegates that may be very hard. Anybody that could tell you where this thing plays out in July is a lot smarter than I am. But I would simply say that I didn't have them before, but I now have hotel rooms in Cleveland.

Q And I also wanted to ask, when we hear discussion of the way -- the intersection of trade and the election year, it almost sounds as if it's an issue to be put aside if you're a pro-trade person. We have a potential nominee on both sides of the aisle who are against TPP. Is there going to be somebody making a proactive trade case in the coming election year? Wouldn't that help your chances to succeed?

MR. DONOHUE: We're very involved in that right now at the Chamber, as are individual companies who are spending a lot of time on the Hill now talking about, for example, on the TPP agreement, where this makes a huge difference for them. For example, that agreement is most favorable to agriculture, which in many trade agreements is not the case. It's most favorable to the technology community. It will be very favorable to the pharmaceutical community when -- and we will fix one of the sidebars there. We won't open the agreement. We're not going to renegotiate it. But the history of trade agreements is when you find it all, you've finished it and they write it all down, hey, there are a few things we've got to fix. And that's the case here. And I think you will see some of that.

The Chamber, itself, is running a major, major effort with members of the House and Senate, with all of our chambers around the country. We're running events in every critical city with members of the House and the Senate, and we're doing it coincidental with the election on purpose. We're letting them know what we think is important. They can say what they have to say. They have to vote the way we need them to vote, and half of them can take a walk as long as we get two plus one.

Thanks.

MR. EARNEST: Let me just add one thing to that, Mike, which is that obviously the administration, over the course of this year, is going to continue to make a sustained case about the value of an agreement like the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And certainly when President Obama or other Democrats on Capitol Hill who have been supportive of this process are prepared to make a case, they have a strong one to make -- particularly to Democratic constituencies that often have not traditionally supported these kinds of agreements.

And the reason for that is that this agreement doesn't just cut taxes on 18,000 American goods in some of the most economically vibrant countries in the Asia Pacific region, it also lives up to the kinds of values that Democrats and progressives have long advocated for. This includes historically high standards when it comes to the environment and human rights and labor.

And that's the argument that you've heard the President make before and you will hear him make over the course of this year, that if you are a Democrat who is concerned about labor standards in Southeast Asia, for example, that should make you a strong advocate of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, because this is the kind of agreement that will raise those standards and hold those countries accountable for meeting those standards if they want to be a part of the agreement and if they want to have access to the U.S. market.

That is exactly the kind of common-sense, proactive approach that the President is taking to ensure that our country and our workers are sufficiently prepared to confront the forces of globalization that are only going to increase moving forward.

Justin.

Q Can I just follow on something Mr. Donohue said -- actually, it's for you, Josh -- on biologics, I think was the reference that you made. There's been a lot of questions on Capitol Hill about what the administration is going to do and if the biologics issue is going to be settled in some way. Do you have any insight? You seemed to indicate that there was going to be some change happening. Is that the administration's position?

MR. EARNEST: Well, what I can just say is that as it relates to the TPP generally, there are a number of conversations that we're having with both Democrats and Republicans about the most effective way to move the agreement forward in Congress. And we're going to continue to consult with the leadership as it relates to our vote-getting strategy.

We certainly are also engaged on the substance. It's not just about the process, but also on the substance. And there are a number of members of Congress who have demonstrated an interest in particular areas of the agreement.

What Tom said is true. The agreement is not going to be renegotiated. We have spent years -- and you've covered this, so you have a good sense of how we've spent years trying to get 12 different countries with a wide variety of economic interests around the table to find common ground on these issues, and we've succeeded in doing that. And we've done that in a way that represents our interests both as a country that's looking to expand and grow our economy, but also as a country that stands for values that are critically important that we're looking to defend all around the world.

So I don't have details of those conversations to share, but we certainly are interested in working in bipartisan fashion on Capitol Hill to build bipartisan support for this agreement. We certainly believe that it deserves it.

Other questions for the two business leaders while they're here?

Okay. Gentlemen, thank you for your time today.

With that, we have a little bit of a time crunch that's related to the President's speech, so, Desiree, I'm going to be counting on you make sure that we stay on time here. But if you guys have questions on other topics, Ben or I can answer them for you.

Yes, sir, in the back.

Q -- the U.S. administration is trying to increase the number of ground forces in Syria. Can you comment on that?

MR. RHODES: Sure. Over the course of the last weeks and months, as we pursue the counter-ISIL campaign, what we've done is where we see that there are efforts that are making progress, we are willing and committed to accelerating those efforts. And if that demands additional resources, we will provide them.

So, for instance, last week, we announced additional support to the mission in Iraq in terms of some specific equipment, including Apache helicopters that can make a difference for Iraqi forces on the ground, a substantial amount of support to the Kurdish forces who are fighting in the north so that they have the budgetary basis to continue to make progress against ISIL, as well as a U.S. role in supporting Iraqi forces who are on the offense through our Special Forces capability in Iraq.

Today what the President will be announcing is his decision to introduce 250 additional U.S. Special Forces into Syria. This brings the number of U.S. Special Forces in Syria to roughly 300.

What we've seen is the small team that we put into Syria several months ago has been very effective in serving as a force multiplier because they are able to provide advice and support to the forces that are fighting against ISIL on the ground in Syria. And we've seen across parts of northern and eastern Syria progress as ISIL has been pushed out of some strongholds.

We want to accelerate that progress, and we believe a commitment of additional U.S. Special Forces can play a critical role, again, as serving as a force multiplier and helping to organize those local forces that are fighting against ISIL on the ground. They will be the ones in the fight, not the U.S. Special Forces. But our Special Forces, again, can provide critical expertise and make them more capable as they have demonstrated that they can take back territory from ISIL.

Q Does local forces mean that Kurds in the north of Syria, or other places as well?

MR. RHODES: So we don't, as a matter of practice, specify the specific geographic area that U.S. Special Forces may be present in. What we have said is that we have worked with both Syria Kurdish and Syrian Arab forces who have been fighting against ISIL. So, again, it's not simply Syrian Kurdish forces; there's also a Syrian Arab force that we have been working with on the ground. And we've seen them making progress in areas along the border in north and eastern Syria and the area of -- well, I'll leave it at that.

Q Can you talk a little bit about how this announcement figures into the President's speech today, and also the meeting he'll have with the Quint leaders today -- if the remarks are going to be focused on this multilateral approach? Is that something he's also going to seek additional commitments from the other countries as well?

MR. RHODES: Sure. First of all, I think we're at a moment where we have seen the relentless nature of our campaign against ISIL has begun to bear significant results in terms of taking back territory. And we've been committed to providing the resources necessary to continue to get this job done.

And so the Syria announcement today, coupled with the announcements that we made regarding our support to Iraq in recent days, I think indicates exactly the model that we see working, which is airpower from the coalition, arming, equipment and training from the coalition, and, as needed, a Special Forces capability that can help them make progress on the ground.

So I think the President will put this in the broader context of what we see working on the ground against ISIL. He will also make the point that just as we are willing to commit more to the fight against ISIL, we think it's important that our allies are also committing more to the fight against ISIL. We've seen them do that in recent months. We've seen increased contributions to the air campaign in both Iraq and Syria. We've seen support in terms of financing and arms and training for forces that are fighting on the ground in Iraq.

But again, we do believe that as we see what works, that there are additional things that our coalition partners can do. And that's something that he'll talk about publicly and privately -- again, with the spirit that everybody is in this fight and we have had important contributions from our European allies. But again, as we diagnose what is working, we see areas where we can provide additional support, and as we see challenges that emerge we want to make sure that we're providing support.

He had the same message, frankly, at the GCC summit recently in Saudi Arabia where those coalition partners can also support our mission in a variety of ways. So, yes, I think his point will be, we will do our part, but this will only succeed if we are working together as a coalition and as a global community to stamp out the threat of ISIL.

Q I'm wondering if you can just kind of talk about -- obviously the President has stated that there would not be ground combat operations, and a kind of a sticking point was Special Forces -- if you can provide any more clarity on why these are not combat troops, especially since the Pentagon has referred to them as such. And when we brought up this issue I think back in October, whenever the 50 first went in, Josh, you said that if you were envisioning a ground combat operation we would see more than 50 Special Forces. We've quadrupled that number now, so is that the transition that's happening here?

MR. RHODES: Let me be very specific about this, Justin. Obviously any Special Forces troops that we deploy into Iraq or Syria are going to be combat-equipped troops. They may be in circumstances where they find themselves in harm's way because these are dangerous places. The question is, what is the mission that they're being given? And the mission that they're being given is not to go into Syria and to engage the enemy, to engage ISIL. So they're not being sent there on a combat mission; they're being sent there on a mission to, again, be advising, assisting and supporting the forces that are fighting against ISIL on the ground.

And again, that's rooted in our belief that ultimately, lasting progress and the ability to push back ISIL and to hold territory that's reclaimed from ISIL is going to have to depend upon those local forces. So, yes, any Special Forces capacity that we put into a country like Iraq and Syria is going to have a combat capability, but our point has been that their mission is not to be out on patrol or out to engage the enemy, it is to support these forces that have been doing the fighting.

And I think the proof of that is in what you've seen, which is that over the course of the last several months, the forces that have been fighting in Ramadi and Sinjar and Kobani in northern Syria have not been U.S. forces. They have been Iraqi and Syrian forces that have been taking the fight to ISIL, again, with the exception, of course, of when we have a leadership operation which we have shared with you all.

On numbers, specifically, what was the question?

Q Yes. Well, Josh said that if you were envisioning combat operations?

MR. RHODES: Well, I think it's -- yes, it's in numbers and nature of the troops. And again, even a number like 300 Special Forces, we're saying they're there on a support mission for those forces fighting on the ground. We're not deploying ground combat units

to be out on patrol in places like Iraq and Syria.

And in order to have, again, a U.S. ground combat mission in one of those two countries, it would be substantially more than we have today. What you see is we have roughly just over 4,000 troops deployed in this theater now, but they're dispersed in different places. They're dispersed among different Iraqi forces and Syrian forces that we're supporting. In Iraq, they're in different bases and facilities. In Syria, again, we don't comment on their location, but they're in that support role.

So we're not deploying large ground combat units to take the place of those local forces. And again, I think the proof that we've been consistent in that point is that anybody who has been following the progress of this campaign can see that the forces that have been fighting on the ground are the local Iraqi and Syrian forces.

Q And the last one on the speech. A lot of people described it as a bookend to the speech in Berlin eight or nine years ago. I know that you wrote that one, so I'm wondering if you can talk about some of the parallels or how you see this as sort of a partner or pairing to that speech.

MR. RHODES: Sure. That does seem like long time ago. But first of all, what I'd say is it's important that we're giving the speech in Germany in both cases. Germany is both at the center of Europe and the center of the European project, and it's also a demonstration of the value of the transatlantic alliance, and a demonstration of what nations can do together when they sustain a commitment to shared security and shared values.

The point that the President made in the Berlin speech is that when the world stands together and acts through collective multilateral action, we will be able to deal with the challenges that confront us. And I think that the last seven years bear that out. If you look at the areas where we've been able to make the most progress in our foreign policy, it's in areas where we've been able to mobilize collective action, particularly including our European allies. That was necessary to get the Iranian nuclear deal. That was necessary to stamp out Ebola. That was certainly necessary to get to the Paris climate accord.

So what we've seen is when we're working collectively, we can make progress against these challenges. Now, as the President was coming into office, those challenges included the fact that we were on the verge of a global financial crisis that hit right after his Berlin

speech. Again, it was collective action -- including very close coordination with Angela Merkel -- that helped us climb out of the global financial crisis.

Today, what he'll say is that we're dealing with a set of challenges from migration, from the civil war in Syria and ISIL and from Russian aggression. And if you look at each of those issues, they, too, require us to work together so that each of us is bearing our share of support for refugees, so that all of us are doing our fair share against ISIL, that we're sticking together in standing up to Russian aggression.

So, once again, he'll be making the point that we should not go it alone, we should not walk away from the values and institutions that allowed us to make such progress. We should be redoubling our efforts to work together to confront those challenges. And again, here in Germany at a time when there are lots of questions that you've all covered over the course of this trip about the European project, about European unity, I think the President is coming as the strongest ally of Europe to say that we have complete confidence in Europe's ability to deal with these challenges; that Europe itself has demonstrated over the years that it's more than capable of rising to the occasion when it works with us, when it works together as a European Union, and when we are both committed to the values that we've stood for since World War II.

Q Do you expect any new initiative or pledge to fight ISIS in Libya as well, sustaining the Government of National Accord? And on immigration issue, giving them NATO assets?

MR. RHODES: So with respect to Libya, we've been concerned about the ISIL presence. We don't see it on the scale that we have in Iraq and Syria. But we do believe that the most important effort right now is to support the Government of National Accord so that there can be some governing authority in Libya that's been missing over the last recent years, even as we're also going to have targeted counterterrorism efforts when we see an ISIL target that needs to be taken off the battlefield.

I do think Libya has been a feature of the discussion that the President has had with each of the leaders along this trip. At the Gulf summit, with Prime Minister Cameron, yesterday with Chancellor Merkel. I'd expect Libya to be one area of focus of the Quint meeting today. I think that there will be discussions about how to support that Government of National Accord, what are the different resources that can be brought to bear from Europe and the United States.

There will be discussion of what are the counterterrorism concerns regarding ISIL in Libya. But also, there will be a discussion of the refugee flows and what are the best ways that we can work together to manage and deal with those refugee flows. We're certainly doing that, of course, in the Aegean.

I think more broadly, we will want to be making the point, as the President has done in his meetings, that as we get to the NATO summit in July, we'll be wanting to look at how we are reinforcing NATO's eastern flank through our reassurance effort in the face of Russia's aggression. We also want to make sure that we're reinforcing our southern flank. And that's something, of course, that Prime Minister Renzi has raised repeatedly, and President Obama certainly agrees that NATO has to make sure that it has a strategy and resources that are dedicated to supporting all of our allies, including our southern allies.

Q Two questions, one on Syria. Obviously, the President has talked a lot about wanting to have less of a footprint in terms of a military presence in general. I wonder if you could just offer a little more insight about how he weighs that against the decision to send more personnel into Syria. And more broadly, he talked on Saturday a little bit about his legacy, and I wonder how he would assess his foreign policy legacy at this point, just whether he's been able to kind of effect the change around the world he thought he would be able to in his presidency.

MR. RHODES: Those questions are somewhat related. I think, to your first question, it's important to remember when he spoke in Berlin in 2008, the United States had 180,000 troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. We were, for all intents and purposes, providing the security in those countries. We were losing troops at a tragic and regular pace in both of those countries. And the war in Iraq had dominated American foreign policy.

We have significantly changed the nature of American foreign policy over the course of these last seven years so that it is not overwhelmingly focused on a project like the war in Iraq that we believe had distracted us from the fight against terrorism and many other global priorities, and it is now addressing a much broader set of issues in regions.

Specifically on the footprint issue, again, we are fighting terrorism because we always said -- and we said back in 2008 -- that we would be relentless in pursuing strategies to root out terrorist networks. But we're doing it in a different way. As I said, we have just over 4,000 U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria. We've got just under 10,000 in Afghanistan. That's significantly lower; that's a fraction of the 180,000 that were there when the President took office. And, importantly, their mission is very different. They are in a support role.

They are conducting airstrikes through our air campaign. They're supporting local forces who are doing the fighting on the ground and who are on the front lines. And that is a different model from what we were pursuing when the President took office.

So even as we are still engaged in these conflicts, and even as we are relentless against terrorist networks, we have been able to significantly reduce the number of American troops in harm's way, the resources that we have to dedicate to those projects. We've been able to build a large coalition to go against ISIL, which I think brings together well over 60 countries in a demonstration that this is not simply an American effort.

So we've changed the way that we fight terrorism, and we've been able to do so in a way that reduces the risks and the resource allocation for the United States while still being able to take terrorists off the battlefield. And, frankly, we think it's more effective in the long run, because the only way you're going to get lasting security in these places is if local forces take the initiative, because even when we did have these large ground forces deployed, we were still seeing a continued sectarian violence fighting in the presence of terrorist networks.

To your second question, I think if you look at the Berlin speech and you look at what the President wanted to get done when he came into office, we have been able to effect a significant amount of change around the world.

First of all, the United States has been able to resolve the most pressing nuclear nonproliferation concern that we had when we came into office. We've been able to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. And we've been able to do so without going to war, because we've reprioritized diplomacy, just like the President said that he would. It took nearly seven years, but we were able to peacefully get Iran to significantly roll back its nuclear program. That makes us safer; it makes the world safer.

We reengaged on international climate negotiations, where the United States had been absent when the President took office. He committed to do that when he came to Berlin in 2008, and here we are today with the most ambitious international climate accord that has ever been agreed to. And that to do very much to U.S. leadership in bringing along China and other nations behind an ambitious set of targets.

We've also, even as we've maintained a significant focus on the Middle East -- as you've seen during this trip -- and on terrorism, been able to rebalance our focus to other regions of the world. So in the Asia Pacific, we've been able to negotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, and we've been able to significantly increase our diplomatic engagement and presence and what we believe is one of the most important emerging regions of the world. In Latin America, we've been able to transform our position through the opening to Cuba.

So what the President talked about when he came into office -- prioritizing diplomacy, working with allies, building collective action to deal with the challenges of our time, and addressing issues like climate change that had not been on our foreign policy agenda -- I think we've been able to follow through on those commitments.

The fact of the matter is, it's a dangerous world, and so there are always going to be challenges. And we continue to face challenges from terrorism, from migration, from Russia, as I mentioned. But the approaches that worked the last seven years are the approaches that need to be applied to those issues and, again, building coalitions, doing our fair share but making sure that we're working with others to see that they're bearing their share of the burden as well, and staying true to the values that the U.S.-German and U.S.-European alliance has stood for for decades.

MR. EARNEST: Thanks, everybody. We're going to bring this to an end and listen to the President's speech.

END

10:38 A.M. CEST